

Trevor Shailer

Boxing

Early years

Trevor Shailer (Ngati Hauiti, Ngati Kauwhata, Ngati Raukawa) was born in Levin on New Year's Eve, 1970. His family moved to Palmerston North, where Trevor grew up and went to school. He was involved in all available sports when he was growing up, and showed early promise – playing representative level softball for Manawatu and trialling for the Manawatu rugby representative team.

Trevor's parents both have Māori heritage, however, he wasn't brought up in a strong Māori environment. He was hugely influenced by Māori culture at school. Te reo Māori became one of Trevor's favourite subjects at school due to the influence of inspiring Māori teachers at both intermediate and college.

Trevor grew up with four brothers, which made for a competitive home environment. When Trevor was ten, his father decided the boys should learn to defend themselves. Boxing was in Trevor's blood – his grandfather was a middleweight champion in the navy and his great-grandfather was also a boxer. So Trevor and two of his brothers joined the Kiwi Boxing Club, run by Peter and Martin Fitzgerald. At the beginning, the focus was on defence, not on the art of boxing, but this soon changed, as Trevor showed promise.

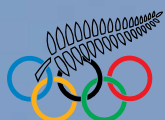
At the age of eleven, Trevor had clear goals. He overheard his boxing coach telling his parents about his potential, saying that if he worked hard and dedicated himself to the sport, he could get as far as the Olympic Games. This inspired Trevor, and he made it his goal to go to the Olympic Games one day. In 1983, just the following year, he took the first step towards the Games by winning his first New Zealand junior boxing title.



Trevor (front row, centre) was the captain of the Manawatu under-12 softball team.



The start of Trevor's boxing career: his first New Zealand junior title, at age 12.



After winning his first national title, Trevor had to decide whether to keep playing all the sports he enjoyed or to commit to one sport seriously. Remembering his goal to get to the Olympic Games, Trevor committed himself to boxing training. His hard work paid off – since 1983, he has competed at the National Championships sixteen times, and won his division fifteen times. He has also won the Jamieson belt, which is awarded to the most scientific/technical boxer at the National Championships, four times.

1992 Barcelona Olympic Games



Trevor's family supported him as he prepared for the Barcelona 1992 Olympic Games.
Pictured here: [Names and order to come]

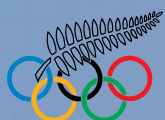
Trevor's dad encouraged him to pursue boxing because he worried Trevor would get hurt playing rugby! While this sounds strange, Trevor had 177 fights in his career, with no major injuries. He puts this down to the fact that he just didn't like to get hit, so he excelled as a natural counter boxer, which is based on defence.

After ten years of dedication and hard work, Trevor was selected for the New Zealand team to go to the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain. There were only two other boxers in the team – Sililo Figota and David Tua. Trevor was in the light welterweight division.

Boxing is an individual sport. This can often contribute to a sense of isolation – even at the biggest sporting event in the world. Trevor was a shy 21 year old, who couldn't believe he had made it this far. He felt out of his depth in the elite environment, alongside athletes he had been idolising for years. It wasn't until he walked into the stadium during the Opening Ceremony that Trevor truly believed that he was New Zealand's 668th Olympian.



Standing tall: The boxing team bound for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona.



Trevor's most memorable experiences at the 1992 Olympic Games did not take place in the boxing ring. The New Zealand team function featured a performance from Ngāti Rānana, the London Māori Club. They had been flown over from London to perform for the New Zealand team and they were singing songs Trevor knew from growing up. When the leader of the group saw Trevor singing along, he called Trevor over and asked him to join in. Trevor joined the group for a powerful haka.

Despite being awed by the more experienced athletes in the New Zealand team, Trevor connected well with another first-time Olympian, Barbara Kendall, and her brother Bruce. These friendships helped Trevor cope with his disappointment when he didn't perform as well as he'd expected to in his event, losing in his first fight. Trevor puts his loss partly down to overtraining – he didn't know how to prepare for such a big tournament, so he just trained his hardest. He realises now that you have to be doing the right kind of training at the right time.

Life in Manawatu

Part of the reason Trevor was so disappointed in himself was the feeling of letting down his community. He was the only Olympian representing Manawatu at the 1992 Olympic Games, and had received a lot of support from the community. His parents arranged a golf tournament at Linton Army Camp in Palmerston North and raised about \$4,000 (the most the club had ever raised in one day) to support Trevor's training. The family also ran raffles in the community. The fundraising and support from the community allowed Trevor to take six months off work to train before he went to Barcelona.

1994 Victoria Commonwealth Games

After the Barcelona Olympic Games, Trevor returned to work at the public health unit. Alongside his job, he completed a certificate in health promotion through Otago University, while continuing his boxing training, aiming to qualify for the upcoming Commonwealth Games. As the Oceania light-welterweight champion, Trevor was selected for the 1994 New Zealand Commonwealth Games team to travel to Victoria, Canada.

Trevor used his previous Olympic experience to prepare for the Commonwealth Games. Interviewed shortly before the Games, Trevor said "Hopefully, if I can perform to the best of my ability, then the results will come, and hopefully that will be a medal".

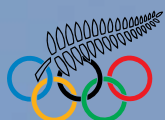
Trevor walked away from the Commonwealth Games with a Bronze medal. In 1994, he was also named Manawatu Sportsman of the Year and the first New Zealand Universities Māori Sportsman of the Year.



To watch Trevor performing with Ngāti Rānana, visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GknqNrrjE0o>

The support Trevor received from the community extended beyond his sports career. His coach's father, Rangi Fitzgerald, was a well-known and highly respected Kaumātua for Rangitāne in Palmerston North.

Because Trevor started representing New Zealand in boxing at such a young age, his secondary school studies suffered. It became clear that Trevor wasn't going to pass sixth form (year twelve) due to the amount of time he'd been travelling for competitions. Rangi Fitzgerald arranged an interview for Trevor with Māori Affairs (now known as Te Puni Kōkiri). This led to a scholarship for Trevor in the Māori and Pacific Island Cadet Scheme. He started a job at the local public health unit when he was only seventeen.



Continuing the Olympic journey

In 1995, Trevor retired from boxing after 12 years to focus on his career in public health promotion and communications. He had a brief boxing comeback in 1999, winning the national welterweight title.

By the time of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games, Trevor was ready to continue his Olympic journey. He joined the New Zealand Olympic Committee's Māori Advisory Group, and travelled to Athens with the team as cultural support, alongside Kaumātua Amster Reedy.



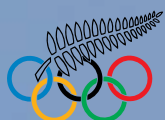
Trevor (in red) at the 2000 Oceania Amateur Boxing Champs



Leading the Haka in Athens, 2004

Athlete support staff

During the Olympic Games, the public focus is on the competing athletes. But there are essential people travelling with the team to support the athletes. The support staff aim to create a high-performance environment so the athletes can excel when it's time to compete. Many of the athlete support staff are former competitors, like Trevor, who can draw on their own experiences to create the environment to ensure athletes have an inspirational Olympic Games experience.



As a cultural advisor, Trevor sees his role as providing experiences, events and activities that have long-term meaning for the athletes. Remembering the most inspirational parts of his own Olympic experience, he acknowledges the importance of promoting both a sense of belonging to the team and what it means to represent New Zealand on the world stage. Two important aspects drive the athlete support to New Zealand's presence at the Olympic Games:

- being strong and confident in who we are as a country and a team
- acknowledging and paying respect to the host country and their culture.

The support staff prepare the Olympic Village before athletes arrive. This doesn't just mean making sure they have all the essentials, such as comfortable beds and Internet connections. Part of the preparation is creating a New Zealand flavour or connection in the village as a link to home. Another important aspect is welcoming each athlete to the team as they arrive. The members of the team who are already at the village gather and do a haka to welcome the arriving athletes. This also shows respect for each athlete and their achievement of becoming an Olympian. Those athletes then join the team to welcome the next athlete, which ultimately helps to set the tone of how the team operates together.

As Trevor explains, this can be difficult at a large event like the Olympic Games. Due to all the different sports involved, the team is not always based together in one village. For example, there are some sports that aren't based in the main village and are accommodated closer to their sports venue. Part of Trevor's role is to develop strategies to ensure all team members feel connected and supported.

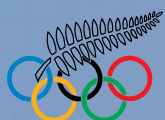
2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic Games

In 2010, Trevor travelled to the Vancouver Winter Olympic Games with the New Zealand team. In order to show their respect for the host country, the New Zealand team connected with the local indigenous people – the Squamish Nation. Māori and Squamish people already had strong ties in education and other matters, and it was important to be welcomed into Squamish territory from a cultural perspective. The team was invited to the totem hall of the Squamish people where they underwent a traditional blanketing ceremony. The blankets represent protection – the Squamish people were offering the New Zealand team protection while they were in Canada. The New Zealand team was the only team to have this experience. For the athletes, the ceremony served as a reminder of the importance of international friendship and respect at the Olympic Games. At the time, Trevor wrote, "I'm hoping it will help anchor our team and inspire our athletes to great things".



Pou

At the Athens Olympic Games in 2004, the entrance to the New Zealand team space was marked by a specially carved pair of posts, called Pou. They symbolically linked the Olympic team members with their ancestors and their environment or *tūrangawaewae* (place of standing). They were a reminder of New Zealand's strength as a country and as a team. The Pou also provided a gathering point to welcome and celebrate as a team.



Trevor was honoured to be blanketed twice during the ceremony, once as part of the team, and once as a speaker. This meant he could speak on behalf of the New Zealand team, but it also means he is now a blanketed speaker for the Squamish Nation. The honour is a lasting one – he could be invited back to speak for the Squamish Nation at any time.

Balance

One of the challenges Trevor faces now is balancing his work with the New Zealand Olympic team, which involves a lot of travel, and his family life. As the father of two young children, Trevor is aware of trying to be a positive role model. He says, “I’m keen to make sure my kids are passionate about what they want to do, which means showing them that I myself am passionate about what I want to do and want to achieve”. He believes that while his work with the Olympic team means he has to be away from home at times, it shows that he’s striving to help others achieve their goals and that he’s determined to be the best he can.

When it comes to the Olympic Games, Trevor sees sport in a wider context. In 1996, he attended the Young Participants session at the International Olympic Academy in Olympia, Greece – home of the ancient Olympic Games. This gave Trevor an insight into Olympism, the principles and values upon which the modern Olympic Games are founded. He experienced these principles, ideals and values through his participation in sport and at the Olympic Games, and he has carried them into all aspects of his life. Trevor sees sport as a vehicle for determination and passion. But he’s also aware of one of the original goals of the Olympic Games – to promote respect for people from all around the world. Part of his role as support staff is to help the athletes find some balance and not become so focused on their sport that they miss the other inspirational experiences of the Olympic Games.

By the end of the London Olympic Games in 2012, Trevor will have been to the Olympic Games five times – once as an athlete and four times in an athlete support role. He has more than achieved the goal he set as an 11 year old.

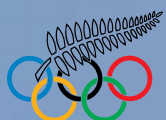
In June 2012, Trevor was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to sport and the community.

Secret to success

One of Trevor’s favourite phrases is “I’d rather get a sore neck from aiming too high than a hunchback from aiming too low”. He believes that a lot of people are so scared of failure that they won’t try things and that they won’t set big goals. Despite the achievement of being New Zealand’s 668th Olympian, Trevor wonders if his goal was too low. If he’d set a goal of winning a medal at the Olympic Games, rather than just going to the Games, would he now have that medal?

Trevor says...

“I feel privileged to have the opportunity to work with our athletes and team members at the Games. To be associated or around athletes who are so focused on their pursuits reminds me that even though I’m no longer pursuing sport goals, the same goals apply to life”.



References

Personal comments from Trevor Shailer

<http://www.boxingnz.org.nz/page/news.aspx?news=1243>

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/winter-olympics/3318770/Reminders-of-home-for-NZ-Winter-Olympians>

<http://trevorshailer.blogspot.com/>

From Mobil Sport: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UL53Qqgejn8>

Photos courtesy of Getty Images, NZOC Olympic Museum Collection and Trevor Shailer personal collection.